



Public Health Information Factsheet

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National Capital
202-619-7070

Northeast
978-970-5033

Southeast
404-562-3124
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Midwest
402-221-3786

InterMountain
303-969-2922

Desert Southwest
505-988-6040

Pacific West/Pacific
Islands/Alaska
510-817-1375
206-220-4270

Web Resources

NPS Public Health:

http://www.nps.gov/public_health/

CDC:

<http://www.cdc.gov>

State and Local Health Departments:

<http://www.cdc.gov/gmmwr/international/relres.html>

Hantavirus - Camping

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) was first recognized in 1993 in the Four Corners Area of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah. Since then, it has been found in over half of the states in the United States. HPS is fairly uncommon and the chances of becoming infected are low (less than 200 confirmed cases). However, the outcome of HPS infections is very serious with almost half of all cases (approximately 45%) resulting in death.

What is the source of HPS?

The deer mouse is the primary carrier of the virus. This rodent is found throughout the United States, except in the Southeast and East Coast. In the Southeast, the cotton rat is known to carry hantavirus. In the East Coast, the rice rat and the white-footed mouse carry hantavirus.

How is the virus spread?

Hantavirus is spread from wild rodents to people. The virus gets in the air as mist from urine and saliva or dust from feces. Breathing in the virus is the most common way of becoming infected although you can also become infected by touching the mouth or nose after handling contaminated materials. A rodent's bite potentially can also spread the virus.

What are the symptoms of HPS?

Symptoms of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome usually appear within 2 weeks of infection but can appear as early as 3 days to as late as 6 weeks after infection. First symptoms are general and flu-like: fever (101-104°F); headache; abdominal, joint, and lower back pain; sometimes nausea and vomiting. However, the primary symptom of this disease is difficulty in breathing, which is caused by fluid build-up in the lungs and quickly progresses to an inability to breathe. If any combination of the symptoms described above especially difficulty in breathing appear after direct or indirect exposure to rodents, contact your doctor or public health clinic immediately and be sure to mention your exposure to rodents.

To minimize the risk for hantavirus infection, follow these precautions:

- Before occupying abandoned or unused cabins, open them up to air out. Inspect for rodents and do not use cabins if you find signs of rodent infestation.
- If you sleep outdoors, check potential campsites for rodent droppings and burrows.
- Do not disturb rodents, burrows, or dens.
- Avoid sleeping near woodpiles or garbage areas that may be frequented by rodents.
- Avoid sleeping on bare ground; use a mat or elevated cots if they are available.
- Store foods in rodent-proof containers and promptly discard, bury, or burn all garbage.

References

Health Information, National Center for Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services.

If you have any questions, please contact a Regional Public Health Consultant, park sanitarian or call WASO Public Health for more information at 202-513-7226.

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